

Message Text

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51

ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0169

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PASS COMMERCE & OPIC

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EMIN, EINV, TH

SUBJ: TEMCO CONCESSION CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

REF: BANGKOK 0227

1. IN REFTEL, EMBASSY REPORTED THAT THE RTG AND TEMCO HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON ISSUES BETWEEN THEM AND THAT THE DECKS APPEARED CLEAR FOR THE COMPANY (50 PERCENT OWNED BY UNION CARBIDE, 50 PERCENT BY SHELL) TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS. SINCE THEN THERE HAS BEEN A DRUMBEAT OF PROTEST AGAINST THE CONCESSION BY CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PRESS, STUDENTS, AND THE GOVERNOR OF ONE OF THE PROVINCES IN WHICH TEMCO OPERATES, GOVERNOR THAWAT MOKKARAPHONG. THE CRITICS PROTRAYED THE CONFLICT AS ONE BETWEEN AN AMERICAN MONOPOLY EXPLOITING THAILAND'S RESOURCES AND THE VALIANT VILLAGE MINERS FIGHTING TO PRESERVE THEIR HERITAGE AND LIVELIHOOD. RESPONDING TO THESE PRESSURES THE CABINET HAS REFERRED THE QUESTION OF THE LEGALITY OF THE CONCESSION TO THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE.

2. IN A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, ARUN SORATHET, AND AN EMBASSY OFFICER JANUARY 24, ARUN
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SAID THAT IF THE INVESTIGATION SHOWED ILLEGALITY ON

TEMCO'S PART, THE CONCESSION WOULD BE REVOKED. HOWEVER, HIS OWN BELIEF WAS THAT THE COMPANY HAD OPERATED LEGALLY AND THAT THE CONCESSION WOULD BE UPHELD.

3. ARUN WAS QUITE CRITICAL OF GOVERNOR THAWAT, WHO HE SAID HAS SUPPORTED AND ENCOURAGED THE POACHING NOW GOING ON AT THE CONCESSION SITE. HE SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT ONE OF THESE POACHING BOATS WITH 10 MEN COULD MAKE ABOUT 8,000 BAHT (\$400) A DAY FOR THE TIN RECOVERED BY DIVING NEAR THE TEMCO DREDGE. SUCH TIN IS SMUGGLED OUT AND SOLD IN PENANG, MALAYSIA, WITH THE THAI GOVT GETTING NOTHING FOR IT.

4. COMMENT: IN THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE SANYA GOVT, OFFICIALS SEEM TO HAVE NO DESIRE TO STAND UP TO ANY PRESSURE GROUP, AND THOSE OPPOSING THE TEMCO CONCESSION HAVE A POPULAR CASE, SINCE THERE IS WIDELY HELD BELIEF THAT THE ORIGINAL CONCESSION WAS GAINED CORRUPTLY. EVEN SOMEONE LIKE ARUN, WHO RECOGNIZES THE DISTORTION OF THOSE OPPOSING THE TEMCO CONCESSION, HAS NO WISH TO BE OUT IN FRONT IN ANY DEFENSE OF THE COMPANY. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, TEMCO OFFICIALS STILL SEEM CONFIDENT THAT THE COMPANY WILL RIDE OUT THE STORM. THE STEAM MAY WELL GO OUT OF THE PROTEST MOVEMENT IN THE POST ELECTION PERIOD.
KINTNER

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